



SHARP FACTS

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)



What are STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, are diseases you can get by having sex - vaginal, oral, or anal - with someone who is already infected. STDs are caused by bacteria or viruses that are spread through blood, semen and vaginal fluids. Some STDs, like herpes and genital warts, are also spread simply by touching infected skin. If a woman is pregnant and has an STD, she and her developing baby may both be affected. Anyone who is sexually active can get an STD.

Globally, an estimated 333 million new cases of curable STDs occur each year among adults. Over the past four decades a great deal of progress in STD prevention has been made in the United States. Rates of gonorrhea and syphilis have recently been brought to historic lows. Yet the U.S. still has the highest rates of STDs in the industrialized world, with rates that are 50-100 times higher than other industrialized nations. There are an estimated 15 million new cases of STDs in the U.S. each year. Of these, about one-quarter occur among teenagers, 15 to 19 years old. A recent CDC report documented that over 85% of the most common infectious diseases in the U.S. are sexually transmitted.

Dangerous and Deadly Consequences

Most Americans are aware of HIV infection and AIDS, the most deadly of all STDs. But, for much of society, the other serious risks related to unsafe sexual behaviors may have been forgotten. There are over 20 diseases that are transmitted sexually. Many have serious and costly consequences. Some of the most common and serious STDs include:

Chlamydia An estimated 3,000,000 new cases each year. An estimated 1 in 10 of all American adolescent females are infected. Most infected females don't know it, and about 75% have no symptoms.

Gonorrhea An estimated 650,000 new cases each year

If not adequately treated, 20 to 40 percent of women infected with chlamydia and 10-40 percent of women infected with gonorrhea develop upper genital tract infection, also called **pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)**. Among women with PID, scarring will result in involuntary infertility in 20 percent, potentially fatal ectopic pregnancy in 9 percent, and chronic pelvic pain in 18 percent. **Ectopic pregnancy** is the leading cause of first trimester pregnancy-related deaths among American women. The ectopic pregnancy rate could be reduced by as much as 50% by early detection and treatment of STDs.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) An estimated 5,500,000 new infections each year

Sexually transmitted HPV is the single most important risk factor for **cervical cancer**, which was responsible for approximately 5,000 deaths in American women in 1995. Pap smears can identify early signs of cell abnormalities and precancerous conditions. In addition, there are non-cancer-inducing types of HPV that cause genital warts. There are many treatments, but no cures for genital warts. The warts may go away, but the virus remains and others can be infected. There are likely more than 20 million Americans infected with HPV.

Genital Herpes An estimated 1,000,000 new cases each year

Herpes may be the most common STD in the United States. It is estimated that as many as 45 million Americans may now carry the herpes virus. There is no cure, but there are drugs to reduce the pain and length of outbreaks and reduce the likelihood of infecting a sexual partner.

Syphilis An estimated 70,000 new cases each year

Congenital Syphilis An estimated 3,400 new cases each year (babies born who need syphilis treatment)

Fetal or neonatal death occurs in up to 40 percent of pregnant women who have untreated syphilis. As many as 40 percent of live-born infants of women with untreated early syphilis suffer irreversible health consequences. The genital sores caused by syphilis in adults make it easier to transmit and acquire HIV infection sexually.

HIV An estimated 40,000 new infections each year

Sixty-four percent of all people diagnosed with AIDS, to date, have died. New advancements in the treatment of HIV disease, namely combination therapy, can increase the quality of and prolong life for people with HIV infection, but there remains no cure and no vaccine. Prevention remains our best and most cost-effective tool for saving lives and bringing the epidemic under control.

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How can I tell if my partner or I have an STD?

It is possible for you or your partner to have an STD and not even know it. A person can have an STD, such as chlamydia or HIV, and not have any symptoms. However, some STDs may cause symptoms like:

- Sores, bumps or blisters near genitals or mouth
- Itching, burning or pain when urinating
- Pus like or watery discharge from the vagina or penis

How can I protect myself from STDs

Abstain from sex or delay sex

Refraining from having sexual intercourse with an infected partner is the best way to prevent transmission of HIV and other STDs. People can choose to not have sex. People can also decide to wait, or delay sex, until a later time in their life. They may choose to have personal relationships that do not involve sex.

Choose Outer-course vs. Intercourse

Outer-course is non-penetrative contact, such as massaging, hugging, and kissing. Non-penetrative contact vs. intercourse can eliminate transmission risk for chlamydia, gonorrhea and HIV. However, herpes virus and Human Papillomavirus may be transmitted by non-penetrative contact, even if no lesions are visible.

Monogamy

Monogamy is sex between two people, who only have sex with each other, as part of a long-term relationship. If neither partner is infected, there is no risk of disease transmission. Getting to know your partner and his/her sexual history before you decide to have sex can also reduce your chance of exposure to disease. A series of short-term relationships is not as safe because of the increased risk that one of those partners will be infected.

Use Condoms and other barriers

For those who have sexual intercourse outside a monogamous relationship, latex condoms may be effective when used consistently and correctly. Several studies have demonstrated that condoms can reduce the risk of acquiring chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis, syphilis, chancroid and herpes. In addition, definitive data are lacking regarding the degree of risk reduction that latex condoms provide in preventing transmission of genital Humanpapilloma Virus. It is important to note that the lack of data about the level of condom effectiveness indicates that more research is needed - not that latex condoms don't work. The correct and consistent use of latex condoms during sexual intercourse - vaginal, anal, or oral - can greatly reduce a person's risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV infection. **Note:** Washing the genitals, urinating, or douching after sex does not prevent STDs. Any unusual discharge, sore, or rash, especially in the groin area, should be a signal to stop having sex and to see a doctor at once.

Where can I get more information?

Your medical care provider should be consulted if you think you may have been exposed to any sexually transmitted disease. CDC provides information through their National STD Hotline at (800) 227-8922 and their National AIDS Hotline at (800) 342-AIDS (2437). For further information regarding your sexual health, visit the SHARP Home Page at <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp/sharp>.

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